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Speech Act Data Collection in a Non-Western Context: Oral and Written DCTs in the Persian Language

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Abstract

The present study compares two measures most frequently used to assess pragmatic competence: Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCT) and Oral Discourse Completion Tasks (ODCT). The study focuses on these two speech act data collection methods and explores the validity of using different forms of Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs) in non-Western contexts. Twenty four Iranian university students responded to both measures eliciting requestive speech acts. The response length, range and content of the expressions, formality level, and spoken vs. written language forms were analyzed. The findings show that the two measures elicit different production samples from the students. ODCTs induced longer, more elaborate responses, and more linguistic forms representing spoken variety of the language than WDCTs. These differences appear to be caused by the oral mode of ODCTs. In WDCTs students mixed different styles (spoken and written) and used both formal and informal linguistic devices in one situation. Our findings indicate that WDCTs may be inappropriate for collecting data in Persian language, which has marked differences between spoken and written variety and highly complicated stylistic variations. Studies like this underscore the fact that more work is needed to both extend the range and scope of speech act studies to non-Western languages and refine the methodologies used to measure pragmatic competence.

Key Words: Pragmatic Assessment, Non-Western Language, Persian Language, Written DCT, Oral DCT, Speech Act

1. Introduction

Over the last decades, there has been growing interest in the field of interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) in investigating how to teach and learn pragmatics of a second or foreign language. However, the assessment of pragmatic competence has not received as much attention (Bardovi-Harlig, 1999; Ishihara, 2010). Due to the complexity from numerous contextual variables, which influence the pragmatic competence and language use, it has been continuously argued that outcome measures may influence research results (Taguchi, in-press). Therefore, to carefully design outcome measure that elicits learner's productions, comprehension or awareness of a particular pragmatic feature is a prerequisite to conduct research for reliable and valid results. Thus, researchers have worked to develop instruments that accurately assess pragmatic knowledge. This is a challenging undertaking, however, given the social nature of pragmatics

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(McNamara & Roever, 2006, Eslami & Mirzaei, 2012) and the variability even of native speaker production (Cohen, 2004).

Several types of data collection methods have been developed to assess learners' interlanguage pragmatic competence: recordings of natural discourses, the Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCT), Multiple-Choice Questionnaires (MCQ), verbal protocols and the rating assessment tests (see Bardovi-Harlig & Shin, this volume for other pragmatic assessment measures). In this paper, the two methods most frequently used for ILP assessment, Written Discourse Completion Tasks (WDCT) and Oral Discourse Completion Tasks (ODCT), will be addressed. Unlike the recordings of authentic discourse, these two methods allow a researcher to have some control over the interactions and variables. In other words, in using these methods, the researcher can decide the setting and control conditions intervening in interaction. However, significantly different pragmatic features could be found in the WDCT and the ODCT because the WDCTs asks learners to write rather than vocalize what they would say in a certain situation. Researchers should take these issues into consideration when choosing a certain method for data collection, especially in languages such as Persian, in which spoken and written variety are highly different in terms of lexical, morphological and formality level (Hodge, 1957). As opined by Trosborg (2010), there is still the need to investigate further different pragmatic measurement tools by widening the types of data collection methods, as well as including learners from distinct linguistic backgrounds.

In response to such calls, the aim of this paper is to examine the effects of two elicitation instruments (i.e. WDCT and ODCT) on learners' production of Persian requests. To this end, we will first provide a review on both oral and written elicitation data collection methods employed in ILP. Additionally, studies aiming to compare both oral and written production data will be reviewed. Then, we will present our study and finally concluding remarks will be presented and suggestions for further research will be provided.

2. Data Collection Methods in Pragmatics

In order to measure pragmatic competence, researchers have used different data collection instruments. Generally, the data gathered from production instruments can be divided into two main categories: "Natural discourse data" and "Elicited data" (Félix-Brasdefer, 2007). To obtain "Natural discourse data", social interaction can be observed in natural situations and recorded using audio- or video-taped recordings (Félix-Brasdefer, 2007). With elicited data, researchers are able to manage the social and situational variables such as gender, age, power, and level of imposition. One common method of data elicitation is discourse completion task (DCT). In DCTs, participants are asked to complete an empty space of a short conversation involving a written situational description with relevant context related information. One advantage of the DCTs is that social and situational variables can, to some extent, be controlled. In addition, it is possible with DCTs for the researchers to collect a great amount of data in a comparatively short amount of time (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2011).

However, DCTs have also been criticized for validity and naturalness in terms of reflecting real communication (Golato, 2003). According to Golato, WDCTs are metapragmatic in that they explicitly require participants to articulate what they believe would be situationally appropriate responses within possible, yet imaginary, interactional settings. As it presents short written segments rather than real-life extracts, the data represents what people think they would say not what they actually say. Also, because it resembles a test-like method (Sasaki, 1998),

learners may also think of the written task as some formal activity and may apply more formal language (Beebe & Cummings, 1996). More importantly, in WDCT, participants are asked to *write* what they would *say*. However, in spite of all the formerly argued limitations of WDCTs, it is obvious they can present "pertinent information regarding learners' pragma-linguistic and meta-pragmatic knowledge on the specific pragmatic feature under study" (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2011, p. 54).

Role-play is another widely used method of data collection in ILP research. Role-play elicits spoken data in which two interlocutors assume roles under predefined experimental conditions (Félix-Brasdefer, 2010). Based on the amount and variety of production involved, a distinction has been made between closed and open role-plays (Kasper & Roever, 2005). Closed role-plays consist of a single informant turn in response to the description of a situation with specific instructions (Martínez-Flor & Usó-Juan, 2011). However, open role-plays may involve as many turns and discourse phases as interlocutors need in order to continue and end their interaction. Similar to WDCT, contextual variables related to the participants (e.g., power, distance) and situation (degree of imposition) can be manipulated by the researcher to investigate their effect on learners' choice of forms to express the communicative act. Thus, role-plays have all the advantages of WDCTs in addition to representing oral production. However, the use of role-plays also entails similar limitations related to validity and naturalness of data as described for WDCTs (Golato, 2003). Other aspects researchers should also take into account refer to the practical issues in that transcription of the long conversations may be very time consuming. Despite these limitations, by involving a face-to-face interaction between two interlocutors, role-play is regarded as more ethnographic and similar to authentic language use than written production techniques, such as DCT described.

2.1. Empirical studies

Although DCT as a data collection instrument has some limitations, it still indicates which particular forms learners employ in a given situation (Kasper & Rose, 2002). Kasper (2000, p. 15) noted that "as long as there is a clear understanding of what DCT data can and cannot deliver, DCTs remain a valuable instrument in the researcher's toolkit." As DCTs are widely used in the pragmatic literature, researchers have tried to determine whether specific design features generate instrument effects, and whether delivery mode affects responses (Kasper, 2000).

A variation of DCT item design is the use of rejoinders. Roever (2001) discusses the merits of this type of modification when using DCT. A DCT with rejoinders provides the imagined interlocutor's response, so that the participant or test-taker is provided with a scenario, and required to produce a speech act, but must produce an act that would logically elicit the provided interlocutor response. This type of DCT narrows the number and type of responses that a participant might give, not only testing the testers knowledge of the necessary reply but also allowing for greater ease in rating. Rejoinders can greatly increase interrater reliability because the presence of a rejoinder limits the responses and makes the necessary reply evident. Comparing American English request data collected from DCTs with and without rejoinders, Rose (1992) found no significant differences on the data elicited. However, Johnston, Kasper and Rose (1998) reported the differences in rejoinder had impact on strategy choice. However, it is not clear whether similar results would be obtained for other languages. That is, different cultures could perceive the role of the hearer differently.

Another DCT feature investigated in the literature relates to the amount of information provided in the situational description that prefaces the dialogue segment. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) conducted a study that compared English native and nonnative speakers' rejections on two types of DCT: one with a description of the situation and a prompt to elicit rejection, and one that provided only a description of the situation. Their results showed some differences between the two forms of the DCT and that the differences among nonnative speakers were noticeably greater than native speaker differences on the two forms of DCT. What is important in their findings is that the questionnaire type seems to have affected nonnative speaker response differently from native speaker responses. Billmyer and Varghese (2000) compared response effects of short descriptions and content enriched descriptions on learner's request realization. They developed two DCT tasks to elicit requests, but included more contextual information in one of the tasks. They found that while the strategy for the request itself was not affected substantially by the added contextual variables, the more detailed prompts elicited more detailed and elaborate responses. For directness level and internal modification of the head act, no difference was found, but the enhanced prompt elicited longer responses and more external modifications.

Furthermore, the mode and medium of delivery also affects DCT responses (Kasper, 2000). Yuan (2001) studied Chinese production of compliments and compliment responses by comparing four data-gathering methods; written DCTs, oral DCTs, field notes and natural conversation. Her study showed that oral DCT generated a significantly larger number of natural speech features than the written DCT. As a result, Yuan (2001) argued that oral DCT is a better method than written DCT in eliciting natural speech act data. However, this study was not without limitations: The study was conducted in a diverse group of people, and, according to Yamashita (1996), if the data is collected from participants of backgrounds diverse in mother tongue, age, education and cultural background, they are not comparable for these variables may affect the results.

As far as the use of DCT in non-western languages is concerned, Rose (1994) administered a DCT consisting of eight request situations to Japanese and American undergraduate students in their respective countries. Rose found that, contrary to the common perception that Japanese interaction is vague and indirect, Japanese requests were more direct than American requests. In another study, Rose and Ono (1995) examined the effect of instrument type in data collection. Their study gave two groups of Japanese students Multiple Choice Questionnaires (MCQs) and Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs). By comparing the elicited request speech acts, they found that the two task types elicited different responses. When using the MCQ's, the participants tended to perform the request with 'opt-out' or 'hint' strategies, whereas the DCT task did not reveal these strategies with much frequency. The researchers postulated that the greater frequency of opting out in MCQ's may reflect the participant's assumption that a DCT requires an answer, even when they would not necessarily perform the speech act, whereas the MCQ gave opting out as an option. The results from the MCQ in this study correlated with previous research about request speech act strategies in Japanese, suggesting that the MCQ produced a more accurate depiction of authentic interaction than did the DCT. However, as Rose and Ono (1995) state, the results may be limited to this particular speech act in Japanese, and may not invalidate DCT's in general or prove the universal utility of MCQ's. These two studies point to how the elicitation method influences performance data and question the cross-cultural validity of such tasks in eliciting such data from Japanese respondents.

Golato (2003) examined the difference between 'naturally occurring data,' or data collected through ethnographic techniques, and data collected from a DCT. By first collecting naturally occurring data, and then developing DCT's representing the same context, she was able to elicit the intended speech acts with the same context for both task types. Golato found that the results differed between the two instruments. The speech acts produced using the DCT did not match those that occurred in the conversational data. She did not use this result to discredit DCTs, but rather claimed that the two types of data collection measure two different things. As she submits, DCT's are useful as they represent "the sum of prior experience" or linguistic memory. While the natural data shows one particular setting, a DCT may accurately represent a speaker's knowledge of pragmatic production as gained from a myriad of experiences.

A number of studies have specifically compared the results of role-plays and production questionnaires. One of the earliest studies comparing WDCT with closed RP (ODCT) was Rintell and Mitchell's (1989) study on elicited requests and apologies from native speakers (NSs) and nonnative speakers (NNSs) in terms of response length and range of linguistic strategies. Their findings show that role-plays elicited much longer responses than DCTs from NNS participants, but not from NSs. This length difference between NSs and NNSs was caused by the NNSs' longer supportive moves, repetitions, and hesitations. They also found that written and oral responses were similar in variety of strategies used and the only noticeable difference was the written data tended to be more 'direct' (p. 267) than the oral data in situations where the task involved an obligatory request instead of a favor. Despite these differences, they concluded "language elicited in this study is very similar whether collected in written or oral form. Both methods elicit representation of spoken language" (p. 270).

Eisenstein and Bodman (1993), using four different methods of natural observation, written questionnaires, oral questionnaires, and open role-plays, investigated how gratitude was expressed by both NSs and NNSs. Their findings revealed that the data from the four methods all shared similar semantic strategies, but that there were differences in the degree of interaction. The naturally occurring data contained more interaction between the respondent and interlocutor, the role-play contained less, and the written and oral questionnaires contained none. Eisenstein and Bodman also reported that interlocutor feedback was critical for successfully expressing gratitude, and that appropriate interactive feedback facilitated conversation. Sasaki (1998) compared Japanese EFL learners' requests and refusals elicited by role-plays and WDCTs and found that role-plays elicited longer responses and a wider range of strategies than WDCTs. More recently, Martinez-Flor (2012) examined the effects of two production instruments (i.e. interactive written discourse completion test and oral role-plays) on learners' use of refusals in a foreign language context. Her findings showed similarities between two types of performance data and, as she submits, the design of a written DCT that adopted an interactive structure similar to the role-play, appeared to have exerted a positive effect on learners' responses.

All of the studies reviewed above show the need for careful examination of elicitation methods and task types before they are considered valid for a particular assessment. DCT's for instance, may not be a valid instrument for elicitation of requests in Japanese (Rose & Ono, 1995). Several of the studies emphasize the importance of contextualizing the speech act so that those being tested can accurately produce the necessary forms (Golato, 2003; Taguchi, 2007). However, previous research does not extend the methodological validation of pragmatic assessment instruments to non-Western languages, and more specifically to languages known to be complex in style variation and highly different in formal vs. informal situations and spoken vs. written mode. Most importantly, since WDCT and oral RP are the most frequently elicitation

methods used to collect assessment and research data in ILP, it is of high importance to investigate their validity in other less studied languages such as Persian.

The present study was thus motivated by the gaps in previous research. First, participants of those studies were mostly ESL students in the United States or EFL students. Previous literature does not sufficiently cover pragmatic performance of participants from other mother tongues. Secondly, the DCT and RP situations used in several studies were often not appropriate for the study participants. Developing items more tailored for different types of participants from specific cultural background is crucial for obtaining valid and interpretable results. A third limitation of previous studies is that data was often obtained from different participants for each elicitation method and, thus, the results may not be comparable. Using the same participants for both elicitation methods is particularly important when checking the validity and reliability of these methods as evaluation measures (Bachman, 1990).

The present study employs participants who use Persian as their mother tongue. The study uses the same participants for WDCT and ODCT to address the shortcoming of previous research. The data obtained by the two elicitation methods are analyzed in terms of response length, content, and the expected differences between spoken and written varieties of Persian in terms of the formal vs. informal language use. The items for the two methods were especially designed for the intended participants, who were Persian L1 students with similar educational and cultural backgrounds. The present study is exploratory in nature, and a precursor to a larger, more confirmatory study.

2.2. Request Speech Acts

Requests are the speech act addressed in this study. Requests have been defined as acts in which the speaker attempts to get hearer to do something. The request act is usually seen as imposing on the hearer and therefore categorized as a face threatening speech act (FTA) (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) proposed that when confronted with the need to perform a FTA, the individual must choose between performing the FTA in the most direct and efficient manner or attempting to mitigate the effect on the hearer. They indicated that the seriousness of a FTA is determined by: (1) the social distance; (2) their relative power relation; and (3) the absolute ranking of imposition in the particular culture (Brown& Levinson, 1987).

According to the Cross-Cultural Speech Act Realization Pattern Project (CCSARP) conducted by Blum-Kulka, House, and Kasper (1989), request speech acts consist of a request head act with optional alerts and modifications. The coding framework for requests distinguished nine types of expressions according to the level of directness. The nine expression types were categorized into three types: Direct requests, conventional indirect requests, and nonconventional indirect requests. An alerter warns the listener of an ensuing speech act, which includes three types: use of terms or pronoun, use of attention getter, or a combination of both. In addition, modifications can be classified as internal and external. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) maintain that CCSARP findings support claims for a universal category of conventionally indirect requests, and that this strategy is highly favored across different languages and cultures (p. 68). However, as stated by Rose (1994), all the languages studied in the CCSARP (except Hebrew) were either Germanic or Romance languages or thus universal claims should be treated with caution. To expand interlanguage pragmatic studies to other languages and examine cross-cultural validity of pragmatic elicitation methods, this study investigates different measurement tools in pragmatics by using performance data from native Persian language users.

2.3. Persian Language

Persian has a very simple grammatical structure and a rich set of stylistic variables that help individuals to convey their feelings (Beeman, 1986). Persian is also known for its noticeable differences between spoken and written varieties and its different discourse styles (intimate/casual, polite, deferential, and royal) (Hodge, 1957). Because the spoken and written forms of Persian differ in a number of essential ways, students, in effect, learn two separate but overlapping dialects.

As mentioned by Beeman (1986), Persian contains a number of stylistic devices that automatically help individuals signal each other concerning aspects of their relationship. These stylistic devices principally deal with contrasts between relationships of hierarchy, which are status differentiated, and relationships of equality, which are status-undifferentiated. Though all languages make use of different linguistic markers based on the status of the interlocutors, in some societies such as India (Dumont, 1970), Japan (Lebra, 1976), and Persia (Beeman, 1986), status based linguistic differentiation takes on special symbolic significance. The stylistic variation (casual to formal) is signaled largely through pronoun alternation, phonological, morphological, and syntactic signals (Beeman, 1986, 14).

As it is related to interactional aspects of sound system in Persian, there exists a definite contrast in the speech of standard Persian between word final consonant clusters, on the one hand, and a reduction of those clusters to single word final consonants, on the other. In comparing the speech of individuals in different contexts it is possible to demonstrate that such an alternation is correlated with different contexts of usage: a speaker's use of one for another is significant in the interpretation of communication events. Context features include the familiarity level between the participants and the relative power of the interlocutors in relation to each other. Sound reduction in spoken (informal) variety is a reasonable response based on assessments of context and relative speaker status.

Additionally, in Persian there is morphological stylistic variation. Morphological variation is most evident in the verbal and pronominal systems. Though verbal/pronominal variation seems to be the predominant indicator of differentiated interpersonal status relationships in many languages, Persian exhibits a distinctive pattern (Beeman, 1986). In Persian, informal variety word order can also change, i.e. the verb may not come at the end of the sentence. Usually the indirect object or prepositional groups follow the verb, e.g. "*Shalvaro daadam besh*" for" *Shalvar raa be u daadam".*

In Persian the great bulk of variation falls on the separable non-verbal components (adjectives, nouns, nominalized verbs and adverbs) that combine with verbal auxiliaries to make the large number of compound verb forms found in the language, as well as on the personal endings attached to verbs. Pronouns and verbs in Persian are oriented in three directions that correspond with basic orientations in social relations. The first orientation reflects relationships of inequality and involves a process of 'other-raising' vs. 'self-lowering.' Basically, one uses terms that serve to place oneself in an inferior status and the other person in a superior one. These consist of a series of substitutions for neutral verbal and pronouns. Thus self-reference may use the expression *bandeh* (slave) in place of the neutral pronoun, *man* (I). Reference to the other person in interaction may substitute the verb *farmudan* (command) for the neutral verb *goftan* (say). Relationships of equality use parallel terms. Both parties will use the same pronoun and verbs, and these tend to be less refined as intimacy between the parties increases.

Short vowels in formal Persian are normally lengthened preceding final consonant clusters. Reduction of consonantal elements tends towards elimination of word final consonant clusters. Syllable counts for both words and phrases are also reduced (Beeman, 1986). Elimination of vowel length in informal style fulfills the general pattern derived for the system of consonants discussed before (Beeman, 1986). As explained above, there is sound reduction morphological, pronominal, verbal, and also word order variation between spoken-informal and written-formal Persian. Thus, there is a possibility that the written and oral production of the language users in ODCT vs. WDCT would reveal the above differences. Speakers may think of the written task as some formal activity and may apply more formal language (Beebe & Cummings, 1996).

3. Methodology

The aim of the present study was to expand speech act and pragmatic assessment studies to a non-Western context, to control for participant variation, and use two versions of controlled elicitation methods (WDCT and ODCT). Thus, this study administered WDCT and ODCT to a group of Persian speakers based on culturally appropriate and plausible situations as the basis of the elicitation instruments.

3.1. Participants

Twenty-four Iranian Persian speakers were given a written and an oral (close role-play) DCT in a counter-balanced format. The participants included 12 female and 12 male undergraduate university students in different fields of study. Their age range was between 20-30 years.

3.2. Instrument

Six request situations were devised for both the WDCT and ODCT. The situations were controlled for the relative power and the social distance of speakers and hearers. Research shows that the participants would behave more naturally in situations that happen routinely in their life (e.g., Trosborg, 1995). In order to use situations that are familiar to the students, the researchers compiled a list of requestive situations from previous research (Blum-Kulka, 1989; Rose, 1994, Rose & Ono, 1995; Woodfield 2008) that they believed were appropriate for Iranian students (30 requests). Next, researchers gave the requestive situations to 15 Iranian students who were similar to the participants of this study and asked them to rank the situations from one (least likely) to three (most likely) based on the possibility of encountering the situations. Based upon the students' rankings, researchers selected six of the situations that varied based on social distance and social dominance. This selection included one situation for each combination of the two variables; social dominance and social distance. Social dominance has three possible values: speaker dominant, hearer dominant or equal status. Social distance has two variables; positive, which means speaker and hearer do not know each other, and negative, which is when speaker and hearer know each other.

The situations included:

a) Ride: Father-ask for car (H, -) (Rose, 1992)) (Hearer dominance – distance)
b) Remote: Younger sister-pass remote control for TV (S, -) (Rose & Ono, 1995)

c) Notes: Friend-lend notes (=, -) (Blum- Kulka, 1989; Rose, 1994)
d) Ride: Neighbor-ask for lift (H, +) (Blum- Kulka, 1989; Rose, 1992)
e) Bus: Student- ask to move seat (=, +) (Rose, 1994)
f) Restaurant: Waiter-ask for fast service (S, +) (Modified from Woodfield, 2008)

3.4. Procedure

The participants were randomly divided into two groups. The groups completed the oral DCT session on different days. Each participant was first given the handout with the situation summaries and given enough time to study the situations. The participant was taken to a room to perform the role-plays. We used closed role-plays in which participants did not interact freely with the interlocutor. The researcher read each DCT situation, the participant responded orally to the situation. This continued until all the situations were completed. The role-plays were audio recorded. In order to collect counter balanced data, half of the participants took role-plays two weeks before DCTs and the other half took role plays two weeks after DCTs. The participants were provided with exactly the same situations they were exposed to for role play. The data then consisted of 144 ODCT situations and 144 WDCT.

3.5. Data analysis

In order to analyze the data, we examined all the requestive strategies employed by the learners in these two production instruments, which made a total of 288 samples (24 students measured with two instruments in six situations). The collected data were analyzed in terms of response length, amount and type of requestive strategies, content of the responses in relation to level of formality (style) produced in each sample.

Researchers transcribed all the role-play data relevant to the requestive speech act. Response length was measured by number of words used in each response. Non-relevant items such as ‘what would I say’ and pause fillers in the ODCT were not counted. Following Sasaki (1998), repetitions were counted as one word and interjections (e.g., *ah, va, a, a*) were not counted. After examining all the responses and classifying the requestive strategies, we contrasted their use in both the oral and written production instruments. In order to show whether the differences in the two elicitation instruments were significant or not, we employed a Chi-square for related samples.

Request strategies were classified based on Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) taxonomy. Blum-Kulka et al. (1989) categorization scheme assumes that a request sequence consists of one or more of the following parts: alerters (e.g., 'John', 'excuse me'), preposed supportive moves (e.g., 'I forgot my wallet'), the head act (e.g., 'Could you lend me a pen, please?'), and postposed supportive moves (e.g., 'I promise to return it tomorrow'). The head acts are categorized into nine types according to the degree of directness. Three major categories of ‘direct’, ‘conventionally indirect’ and ‘hint’ are proposed based on the nine directness level. The head act can be modified by either lexical/phrasal devices (marker please, consultive devices, downtoners, understaters/hedges, subjectivizers, cajolers, appealers) or syntactic devices (conditional structures, conditional clause, tense, aspect, interrogative, negation of preparatory condition).

In addition, data were analyzed for level of formality (informal/spoken vs. formal/written), lexical choice (informal----formal), verb endings (singular vs. plural: e.g., bede (informal/singular/spoken), bedin (formal/plural/spoken), bedahid (formal/plural/written), type

of alerter used (First name (FN), FN+ endearment term (e.g., joon, jan, azizi, azizam) title +last name (LN), title only, professional title +LN)

To establish inter-rater reliability, 20% of the responses were evaluated by a second native Persian speaker and there was 95% agreement between the raters.

4. Results

4.1. Response Length

Request length was defined as the number of words per request. In this study, one of our objectives was to determine if Persian participants produce longer requests in ODCT than in WDCT in their native language. Table 1 shows the mean length of request in each situation for both ODCT and WDCT. As can be seen, oral responses were longer than the written responses. More supportive moves, higher number of alerters, and longer justifications and explanations contributed to the longer oral responses.

Table 1. Mean response length per request

Instrument	Mean	SD
WDCT	12.58	3.4
ODCT	16.63	4.1

* $p < 0.05$

Table 2 shows the mean number of words used in each situation.

Table 2. Mean number of words used in each situation

Ride-Father		Remote-sister		Note-friend		Ride-neighbor		Bus-student		Restaurant-waiter	
WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT
17.8	21.8	9.0	12.5	8.9	12.5	16.4	22.8	8.1	13.8	15.3	16.4

As shown in table 2, two situations (asking for a ride from father, asking for a ride from a neighbor), generated the longest responses. In both of these situations, there is H dominance, and the level of imposition is higher than other situations (e.g. waiter, younger sister).

4.2. Alerters

Table 3 illustrates the mean frequency of requests prefaced by alerters for both WDCT and ODCT. Alerters are used to alert the hearer to the upcoming speech act. They include address terms (e.g., 'baba', Dad) or attention getters (e.g.,' bebakhshid', excuse me). There was a tendency for more alerters in oral than written responses, and the difference was significant at $p<0.01$.

Table 3. Mean number of alerters per request

Instrument	Mean Alerters*
WDCT	. 83
ODCT	1.5

* $p < 0.05$

As shown in table 4, in all situations, students used more alerters when responding orally. In situations with low distance and equal status interlocutors (note-friend, bus-student) the difference between oral and written DCT seems to be more marked.

Table 4. Mean percentage of alerters in each situation

Ride-Father		Remote-sister		Note-friend*		Ride-neighbor		Bus-student*		Restaurant-waiter*	
WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT
.91	1.25	0.8	1.2	0.7	1.53	1.2	2.0	.7	1.35	.7	1.75

*significant at $p < 0.05$

As can be seen in Table 5, there is a rich variety of alerters that participants used in both WDCT and ODCT. Furthermore, spoken and written responses used a similar variety of alerters. It is important to note, however, that the more formal type of alerters, for example, *Sobbekheir* (good morning), *Khastehnabashid* (cheer up), and *pedar* (father), are used more in WDCTs and the less formal ones, including *Salam* (hi), *bebakhsid* (excuse me), *baba* (dad), and *baba joon* (dear dad, spoken variety), are used more in ODCTs.

The most frequently used alerter for both written and oral responses was '*Bebakhshid'* (Forgive me/Excuse me), followed by '*ozr mkiham*' (I'm sorry'). The highest frequency for the combined category was '*Bebakhshid*' +/FN/ or /title/ or /title+ LN/ or /title + title/. In addition, several '*salam*' (greeting/hi), '*khasti nabasin*' (hope you are not tired/cheer up) (+ title) were used in both WDCT and ODCT data.

Table 5. Mean percentage of alerters used in participants` responses

Strategy Type	WDCT %	ODCT %
Salam (hello)	9%	10%
Sobbekheir (good morning)	1%	0%
Bebakhshid, (excuse me)	15%	17%
Ozrmikham (forgive me)	5%	7%
Mazerat mikham (forgive me)	5%	1%
Sharmandeh (ashamed)	2%	1%
Khastehnabashid (cheer up)	2%	2%
First name (e.g., Hassan)	3%	2%
Title (e.g., baba, agha, khanom, jenab, ghorban)	1%	2%
Endearment term (e.g., aziz,khoshgel)	50%	50%
Combinations (e.g., mahin joon, aghaye ranandeh, salam ghorban, aziz jan, bebakhshin agha)		

In total, there were 186 alerters used in WDCT and 226 alerters used in ODCT. The percentage of the different types of alerters used is shown in Table 5. It should be noted that among the requests preceded by alerters, 50% had only one alerter, 40% two alerters and 10% used three alerters.

The researchers used a three-tier scale to judge the formality level of the alerters. Alerters such as *Mahin Joon* (first name, soul), *aziz* (dear), and *baba joon* (dad, soul), were considered informal. Alerters such as *Aghaye Abbassi* (Mr. Abbassi), Jenabe *Akbari*, (title+;last name), *Ghorban* (title), *Pedar* (father) were considered formal, and expressions such as *Hassan* (first name), *Agha* (title), *bebakhshin* (excuse me), and *salam* (hi) were considered neutral. What is noteworthy here is the percentage of the formal alerters used in WDCTs was much more than the ones used in ODCT (Table 6).

Table 6. Level of formality in alerters in ODCT and WDCT data

Instrument	Formal	Informal	Neutral
ODCT	30%	40%	30%
WDCT	40%	35%	25%

4.3. Supportive Moves

Participants used higher number of supportive moves in ODCT than WDCT (Table 7). However, the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 7. Mean number of supportive moves

Instrument	Mean SM
WDCT	1.08
ODCT	1.40

Table 8. Mean number of supportive moves in each situation

Ride-Father		Remote-sister		Note-friend		Ride-neighbor		Bus-student		Restaurant-waiter	
WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT
2.25	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.75	0.88	1.5	2.5	0.7	0.78	1.3	1.75

The highest number of supportive moves were used in situations 1 (Ride-father), 4 (Ride-neighbor), and 6 (Restaurant-waiter). In situation 1, the hearer has dominance, and situation 4, and 6 are both +distance. The imposition to ask a neighbor you do not know for a ride home is considered high, and to ask a waiter to bring food faster requires an explanation.

4.4. Internal Modifications used in the Head Act

Different types of syntactic (conditionals, past tense) and lexical modifiers (politeness marker please, *lotfan*), minimizers (a little, *yek khorde*, *yezare*) were used. As can be seen in Tables 9 and 10, the variety and the frequency of internal modifiers used in WDCT and ODCT were similar. However, similar to the case of alerters, the use of formal lexical markers was more

frequent in WDCT than ODCT. The formal politeness marker please (*khahesh mikonam*,) was used more often in WDCT (21%) than ODCT (17%) and the spoken informal politeness marker please (*lotfan*) was used more often in ODCT (20%) than in WDCT (15%).

Table 9. Mean number of internal modifiers

Instrument	IM
WDCT	1.15
ODCT	1.48

$p < 0.05$

Table 10. Mean percentage of internal modifiers in head act

Ride-Father		Remote-sister		Note-friend		Ride-neighbor		Bus-student		Restaurant-waiter	
WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT
1.0	1.2	0.4	0.6	0.9	1.0	1.5	2.0	1.5	1.8	1.6	2.3

In all situations the number of internal modifiers used in ODCT was slightly higher than WDCT. However, the difference was not statistically significant. The least number of internal modifiers were used in situation 2 (Remote-sister), and 3 (Note-friend). Both situations were '-distance' and in one of them (situation 2) there was speaker dominance and in the other one (situation 3), there was equal relationship between the interlocutors.

4.5. Head Act Strategies

Request strategy was coded following the three-level scale used in the CCSARP. The three levels include direct (e.g., *controle televisiono bede be man*, Give me the control for the TV), conventionally indirect (*mishe yek kami oontaraftar beshinin manam betoonam beshinam?* Is it possible to move over a bit so I can also sit?*)*, and hint or conventionally indirect, (*mashino lazem darin?* Do you need the car?). All the strategies appeared in both WDCT and ODCT but frequency of the strategies used in each data set was not the same. Some strategies were used more often for the WDCT and vice-versa.

Table 11. Type and mean percentage of head act strategies

	Direct		Conventionally Indirect		Hint	
	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT	WDCT	ODCT
Ride-Father	21%	24%	71%	66%	8%	10%
Remote-sister	67%	62%	31%	35%	2%	3%
Note-friend	15%	18%	84%	80%	1%	2%
Ride-Neighbor	13%	14%	79%	76%	9%	10%
Bus-student	16%	18%	82%	81%	2%	1%
Restaurant-	39%	41%	61%	59%	0%	0%

waiter

Table 11 shows the request strategies in each situation for both ODCT and WDCT. There is no clear pattern for request strategy in level of directness. In all situations (except situation 2), the majority of participants used the conventionally indirect strategy to make request. In situation 2 (Remote-sister), the highest frequency of request strategies were direct however. In this situation the interlocutors know each other (-distance) and it is speaker dominant. There was no significant difference between the WDCT and ODCT as far as the strategies that participants used for the head act.

4.6. Discourse Style

In addition, analyzing the data based on CCSARP coding scheme, data were analyzed for level of formality (informal/spoken vs. formal/written). These features include: a) formal or informal lexical choice (*mishe* versus *emkan darad*; *baba joon* versus *pedar*), b) singular or plural verb endings (e.g., *bede* versus bedin versus *bedahid* and c) type of alerter used. Table 12 shows these results.

Table 12. Formal and informal linguistic devices used

Linguistic Feature	WDCT	ODCT
Formal linguistic items (e.g., mishe vs. emkan dare/emkan darad, notato vs. nothayat ra; pedar/baba joon; betavanam beneshinam vs. betoonam beshinam, oonvar, oontaraf)	60%	40%
Informal linguistic items (see above)	20%	40%
Singular verb ending (e.g., bede, tahvil bede, gharz bede, beresoon, byar, beshini…	30%	45%
Plural verb ending (bedahid, byarin, beshinin,)	60%	53%
Reduced From (bedin vs bedahid; besh vs. be oo;)	50%	70%
Combination of both formal and informal (e.g., baram bar taraf konid; ye zare benishinid oonvar)	40%	22%

Note: Total is not one hundred since some devices were used several times in different places.

As can be seen in Table 13, formal linguistic features were used in WDCT data more than ODCT (45% vs. 28%), and informal linguistic features were used more in ODCT data than in WDCT (50% vs. 25%). Additionally, style mixing (using both formal and informal linguistic features in one utterance), occurred more in WDCT data than in ODCT (40% vs. 22%).

Table 13. Discourse style

Type	WDCT	ODCT
Formal linguistic features	45%	28%
Informal linguistic features	25%	50%
Mixed styles	40%	22%

5. Conclusion and Discussion

Our findings show that ODCT data were longer and produced more alerters, supportive moves, internal modifiers, and also reflected a more informal style. WDCT data, on the other hand, were shorter in length, and used a more formal variety of language. The findings also reveal that use of vocabulary and verb endings are different in the two versions of DCT.

The study results show a tendency towards more formal (written variety) use of language on WDCT compared to ODCT. However, participants seem to be more confused as to which variety to use in WDCT than in ODCT. In WDCT, there are more examples of mixing formal (written) variety with informal (spoken) variety. This could be due to the fact that participants were asked to 'write' what they would 'say'. In addition, as shown above, the categories of formal and informal linguistic devices are not exclusive. A linguistic item such as '*benshin*' vs. '*beneshinid*' shows both sound reduction and singular/plural verb ending.

The research result supports the previous differences researchers have found between oral and written DCT. It also indicates that in languages with marked dissimilarities in spoken and written varieties, the difference between written and oral DCT data becomes more noticeable. These differences revealed themselves in the type of alerters and internal modifiers used also. The politeness marker-please (*lotfan*, informal/spoken) for example, was used more often in ODCT and (*khahesh mikonam*, written/ formal) was used more often in WDCT. Furthermore, style mixing (spoken and written) was more evident in WDCT.

Scholars (e.g., Rintell & Mitchell, 1989; Sasaki, 1998), have claimed that production questionnaires and role-playing measure a similar construct. This may apply to languages such as English in which the written and spoken varieties are not as markedly different from each other and both varieties can be considered as one construct. For Persian users each variety has its own inherently unique features and using WDCT and ODCT yields different aspects related to these varieties.

Our findings show performance differences of native Persian language users with these two data elicitation methods. It would be interesting to investigate how elicitation design features may affect performance data of Persian language learners. There is also a need to compare authentic data with oral and written DCT data in order to identify how task design features could influenced participant performance.

It should also be noted that various speech acts may be affected by data elicitation methods differently. More face threatening acts, such as refusals, may reveal more differences between WDCT and ODCT than present in this study. Additionally, the situational variables should be examined more closely to examine how the two elicitation instruments affect the data in high power and high distance situations versus other situational configurations. Furthermore, formality and style shifting should be measured on a continuum and not considered dichotomous categories.

Participants of this study were university students with the ages ranging from 20 to 30 years old. The result might be different with older, more conservative, participants who may adhere to the formal and informal varieties of language use more. Our findings strongly indicate

that more work is needed to both extend the scope of speech act studies to non-Western languages and also refine the methodologies used in pragmatic research.

Results of this study, contrary to other previous studies (e.g., Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993; Martinez-Flor, 2012; Rintell & Mitchell, 1989), indicate that there are significant differences in the two data set of requests elicited by different methods of elicitation (WDCT and ODCT) by native Persian language users. Our findings question the validity of production questionnaires not only because the response is produced in a test-like rather than real-life situation, but because the respondent's spoken performance is intended to be elicited indirectly through the written mode. In contrast, ODCT data is regarded as simulating more authentic situations.

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